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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard

"Saying it like it is!"

"-----"

I hope that everyone had a long and enjoyable Memorial Day weekend. What a great weekend it was around here. The weather was perfect for the entire weekend! I managed to finish up most of my outdoor projects. The veggies are in, all of my flower gardens are full, and most of the mulch has been put down. An electrician fixed our electrical problems with our pool power, so we'll be able to open up the pool as soon as the weather warms up a bit more. They also took care of some other problems that we had. They'll be back for some other things we want checked and added, but they got the major stuff that we wanted done. I'll even get to finish those darn floors in the "new" additions soon! Now I just have to check on the rider mower that's in the shop, and I'll be all set for the outside stuff. My wife will be happy once I start tackling the rest of the indoor projects, finally!

These long holiday weekends make for a short week, so I don't have much time this week to talk about some of my growing pet peeves such as the growing scourge of spam and the like. It's simply amazing with all of the precautions one must take just to try and read our e-mail and do some web surfing! Well, those thoughts will wait for another day.

Until next time...

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NEWSie Update Released

No the subject line is not a typo. ;-)

Available for download is v0.96a dated Jun 1, 2004 which is based on the open source release of NEWSie. This updated should resolve the "begin " issues, at lease with auto-depack enabled it won't mistakenly stop and ask to depack a post anymore.

Like all things new, please use with caution. If you wish to discuss this release please drop me a line at my private mailbox. I may look into other bugs but I make no promises.

Direct download link:
<http://www.bright.net/~gfabasic/files/newsie.zip>

Binary release only at this time and the changes I made are available upon request.

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FreeMiNT <http://sparemint.atariforge.net/sparemint/> [The Future is now!]
Team Atari http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu/stats/team/team_21046.html
L. Pursell [AtarIRC, GFA-Basic, Hades060]

AtarICQ 0.160 Is Released

At last, there is a new release of AtarICQ available! Since the last version was uploaded, many things have happened that made this one get delayed over and over: I got a CT60, which I needed time to install and setup properly. Furthermore, I shortly after experienced a serious hard disk crash which took quite some time to recover fully from. Anyway, things are slowly getting back to normal again now :)

In AtarICQ 0.160, you should not expect any major changes. Instead, there are some important bug fixes present and even the overlay has been updated again. Here is a brief list of the most important additions and changes:

No hardcoded limit for the number of contacts you can add! The internal arrays can be adjusted dynamically on the fly now! (Big thanks to Lp for sharing the GFA info!)

Configuration for sound has been bug fixed and should be much better now

The OVL has had another update, so now aICQ can talk to eg. Trillian and GAIM. Furthermore, some problems with receiving ICQ messages of certain lengths (at least that is what seemed to be the problem) has been fixed.

A problem with reading registration data from file has been cured

Fixed a problem where sometimes the wrong window was given \\\"focus\\\"

XBIOS sound should work on Falcons now (Big thanks goes to Deun!)

As usual, you can read more and download the program here: www.ataricq.org

<http://www.ataricq.org/>

Atari.Org Presents Audio Exposure ST

Atari.Org is pleased to announce the release of Audio Exposure ST, a remix CD of classic tunes from Atari ST.

The CD is produced by Richard Davey of The Little Green Desktop and mirror-hosted by Atari.Org.

The tunes remixed are:

- * Rings of medusa
- * Syntax Terror Fletch
- * Gods
- * Goldrunner
- * The Killing Game Show
- * Mindbomb demo
- * There aren't any sheeps in outer mongolia
- * Verminator

Happy listening!

<http://audioexposure.atari.org/>

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone and I find that other things have intruded into the time that I allot to myself for this column.

I'm not going to hammer at you about registering to vote this week, because I've got a little project that I'd like you to help me with if you happen to live someplace other than the United States.

If you don't mind, drop me a line and let me know what gasoline/petrol costs you. A simple email with the price (in native currency) per gallon/liter would make me very happy. Yeah, I know, I've GOT to get out more. <grin>

Anyway, if you could take a moment to send the above info to me at joe@atarinews.org, I'd greatly appreciate it.

Okay, since you've agreed to do me that little favor, I'll do you one by not going on any longer with this introduction. <grin>

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

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Ben Smith asks:

"Can somebody help so I can View and Print PDF files on my Atari ST?"

Edward Baiz tells Ben:

"There are two ways to do that. Get either Ghostscript or Porthos. Ghostscript can be downloaded from the Internet. Porthos you have to pay for (about \$40). I have both, but Porthos is far the better

way, but you must have a multi-tasking environment."

Kenneth Medin jumps in with some additional information:

"At least the demo version of Porthos runs under single TOS. But, you will need NVDI (V.5 ?) and probably WDIALOG.

On the other hand GEMGS (Ghostscript for TOS) can be used and seem to be usable on 4 MB RAM. Just tested it on a MSTE and it could render at least the two simple pdf's I tried. It's very slow but does not need any NVDI or m-task.

The whole package takes 5.5 MB on the hard disk with the app itself at 1.5 MB. I had it convert the pdf to IMG files and it worked but the result ended up in the \TMP directory with wrong file extender.

On a 16 MHz 68000 it's painfully slow... 2 minutes from launch until the "GS>" prompt appear. Another 3 minutes to get the IMG file at 100 dpi. At 180 dpi I got errors due to lack of memory?

On the TT with lots of RAM it performed better...

Can be found at:

http://www.felschonline.de/c_atari_en.html

You will need at least:

<http://www.tu-harburg.de/~alumnifc/download/atari/gemgs/gemgs13-bin.lzh>
<http://www.tu-harburg.de/~alumnifc/download/atari/gemgs/gemgs13-en.lzh>
<http://www.tu-harburg.de/~alumnifc/download/atari/gemgs/gemgs13-fnt1.lzh>
<http://www.tu-harburg.de/~alumnifc/download/atari/gemgs/gemgs13-fnt2.lzh>
<http://www.tu-harburg.de/~alumnifc/download/atari/gemgs/gemgs13-lib.lzh>

A total of almost 4 MB to download."

Derryck Croker adds his opinion:

"In my opinion, GEMGS isn't the easiest program to set up or use, so if money and OS are no object I'd definitely recommend Porthos.

Anyway, don't forget to thank DDP Translations for the English versions of both these apps."

'Dark Willow' asks about graphics acceleration for his STE:

"I have a 4mb 520STE, with TOS 1.62. I know there are a whole slew of graphic accelerators and upgrade for the Falcon and TT, but is there anything out there for the STE? I don't want to make it super powerful, but enough to be usable for web browsing and basic scanning/image editing, say 800x600 with 4096 colours. Were any boards ever made, and if so, how much do they go for???"

Brian Roland tells Willow:

"For speeding up the STE..."

There have been a few upclocking kits for the CPU over the years that can be bodged into an STe. Check the remaining Atari vendors, as they might have something in the back room that will fit.

There are also kits for speeding up the serial port (the stock STe does 19200 tops). I say 'kit', because some were sold with the parts and instructions boxed and labeled. This is likely something you could find a DIY on the net and order your own parts for if you really wanted.

The STe holds 4meg of SIMM memory. If you haven't already topped that out, it's an easy upgrade. Almost any 1meg, 30pin, 70ns or faster sticks will do the trick.

Getting more than 4meg of memory into an STe is quite a challenge. Marpet made some boards that one 'might' be able to hack into an STe. Even so, it would require TOS 2.06 or MagiC to take advantage of it.

For enhanced graphics...Alla VGA... I'm thinking there was something called "The Panther" that gives the STe one ISA slot. For this slot, there were some NVDI drivers for at least one graphics card, tho' I do not recall which card (for some reason I'm thinking ET4000).

My memory is foggy, but I do believe the Panther was designed with the 1040/520 STe machines in mind. One solution was to recase the motherboard and mount the card inside. Another was to run a ribbon cable outside the factory case, where your graphic card would live in a no frills project box.

If he's still lurking around the Atari business, I would suggest asking Nima (Homa Systems) about anything graphics related for the Atari. It's my understanding that he has been quite instrumental in developing a lot of things on the software end for Graphics cards. He also sold and supported (possibly a developer as well?) the excellent Nova cards, adaptors, and drivers.

Again, my memory is quite foggy....

Try a web search for "Panther Graphics Atari" etc... Even if you can't find the ready built hardware kits for sale anywhere...it should be something you might could build yourself provided you can find the software bits somewhere.

Another thing to consider...

You might find a Falcon or TT, or even build a fast linux box for ARANYM for what it cost to buy or build a graphics card that may or may not work very well in the end.

One of the advantages to having enhanced graphics is the ability to see/process large-colorful images. An STe tops out at 4meg of RAM (unless you're very resourceful and creative). Keep that in mind! To get much accomplished you'd likely need some sort of virtual memory to hard drive tool (outside?), or expensive software that can manipulate images from disk, which would slow things down considerably. Alas, another reason it might be wise to get a different machine than to try to slap a card on an STe. True, the graphics card will have memory built in and allow large fancy desktops, but that doesn't stop the STe from gobbling up more memory to drive the card when it comes to jpegs and such as that.

The STe is perhaps the best machine Atari ever built for running STOCK apps. MIDI, GAMES, etc, that don't call for lots of memory and screen

real-estate. Wish I had one around for that purpose When it comes to power user set-ups, such as MiNT, or hot graphics workstations, you might be better off just getting a new machine with lots of RAM and the graphics capabilities you desire built in. Falcon, TT, Hades, Milan, PPC, or Intel."

Dark Willow replies:

"Yes, the memory I've already upgraded to the max 4mb, though I'm not going to be doing any super-demanding so I'm not too worried about that. I'm loathed to put my STe aside for a TT, Falcon or Hades as for one thing the budget is minimal, and I've already put quite a lot of effort if not money into the STe which I'm loathed to give up on.

I did a lil digging on the Panther card, it did indeed exist and it was the Tseng ET4000 chip that does the tricks. So, with that in mind, I can only give it a try, not going to give up that easy...

Re: Recasing. As it is, my system is in it's original casing. I'm not sure how easy it is to get the Desktopper these days, but am serious considering moving it into an ATX housing, preferably, but not necessarily desktop, and using a PC keyboard and mouse. I know the key'b and mouse is both possible and easy enough to do, BUT just how risky is it resetting the motherboard as I foresee almost certain drilling great big holes in the motherboard to mount it... just how risky is it? I've only ever seen it done once and that was with (you guessed it) a Falcon. Also, will any ATX case do, or is there any one that is particularly good for the job?"

Brian tells Willow:

"Giving up on the STe was not at all what I had in mind. There's far too many jewels that run best on that machine just like it is. I really meant, if you can find a high end machine for less than the ET4000 upgrade would cost, ADD it to the collection.

In my opinion...for a non portable recasing, the bigger the case, the better.

Don't drill any new holes in the STe motherboard itself. Instead, drill the chassis to fit the MB and use nylon or rubber spacers to mount your motherboard. The main thing is to make sure the case is large enough.

I've never done this, but as I think it through here is what "I" would do. I might try it with my Falcon someday

Forget the whole tower case idea....

Go find a nice aluminium flight suit-case with suitable dimensions...popular for cameras for instance. Use either woods, or lucite sheets with proper glue to cut out an instrument panel to your liking (surface area to mount buttons, keyboard, etc). Put a flat panel TFT-VGA screen in the top half of the case, and mount the STe, power supply, disk-drives and graphics card in the bottom half. You could do the keyboard part a number of different ways....either using the exiting keyboard solidly mounted in the case, or make it removable on wire, or totally replace it with a PC or Mega keyboard of your choice. Some kits exist for using non atari keyboards...the latest I is called Eiffel I think.

As for specific 'plans' for my 'portable Atari'....I have none to offer...if it were me, I would hunt parts, be creative, and design the case as I go, solving problems one by one.

Regardless of your choice for a chassis...be it a tower, desk-top, rack, or something portable as I mentioned, these are the basic things to create solutions for.

One of the neatest things of all about the STe, is that it runs very cool. Cooling is not an issue unless you've upclocked it, or put it in a case with several HOT running disk drives or something (not so common with modern drives). In fact, a lot of music studios don't get rid of their ST machines for this very reason. It runs great without a fan...NO FAN NOISE...so a lot of things in the actual sound room gizmos get run by ST machines to this day

1. Power supply....

If you intend just to use the the existing STe power supply...no problems at all. Just wire in a power switch as you like.

If you get a case with power supply and intend to run the STe from it.... The main thing is having a power supply that does not DEMAND some sort of motherboard control (modern power saver features). Some of the newer power supplies don't have a traditional 'on/off' switch anymore. Be careful of that! Otherwise, it's easy...just match the voltages as needed...pretty standard stuff here. Ground, +-12v and +-5v. Do pay attention that there IS a difference between + voltages and - voltages.

2. Port access....

One solution is to mount the MB as close to case edges as possible, and simply drill/punch the holes you need. Another is to make pig tails and or harnesses to extend the ports to anywhere you'd like them.

Another option is to just leave a nice big hole somewhere to let all your original cables run inside the case and plug in where they go. This is fine if you tend to plug everything in and rarely change stuff around.

3. Cartridge/ROM port. If you never use this...just forget about it. If you only have one device, plug it in and forget it. If you use it all the time, with several devices...there's a few options.

a. Mount the MB in a position where you can just punch a hole to access it.

b. Extend the port with a ribbon/card-edge kit, (I.E. CartRight from Wizztronics)

c. Mount a dongle switcher such as Cart Master or Combiner, plug in all your dongles.

4. The last biggie is the keyboard and joystick ports.

a. Remount the original keyboard in the original STe case and use phone cord to build a cable to the STe MB. Design in connector types and positions to your personal liking.

b. Acquire a mega or mega STe keyboard. Wire in appropriate connectors for the cable.

c. Use a keyboard adaptor for PC type keyboard (Deka, Zkeys, Eiffel).

d. Be ultra creative and fashion your own new case and cables for the original STe keyboard. If you can bodge together a bottom half to cradle the keyboard, you can actually cut just the top part of the case that you need for something that looks factory built. Materials you might try for a bottom tray to match the top are light sheet metals easy

for a novice metal worker to fashion, lucite materials, moldable plastics (like car bondo), and of course wood."

David Wade adds:

"The ST (F,FM) and STE systems have no provision for graphic upgrades, and case space is very tight, so as far as I know no upgrades for the machines exist. (Actually I lie, ST class machines can be updated to STE spec by piggy backing two chips). The MEGA, TT and Mega STE all have provision for a graphics card. There are quite a few options for these machines. I don't know what provision the Falcon has, but there are certainly upgrade options."

Nick Harlow posts this about JagFest:

"Well first of all thanks to Pocket, Arethius, Scat and other who made the Jaguar Connexion in France a real nice place to be. Plenty of games, plenty of collectibles, plenty to see and do..."

But now come the Brits with JagFest'04, June 12/13... are you planning to come and see what's happening in the UK Atari World? We still have some more work to do but the event is shaping up nicely with the following attractions.....

Licensed Bar -- A little liquid refreshment to help the RAFFLE go down

Jaguar

Battlesphere Tourney run by Gaztee plus all the latest and Greatest Releases inc Songbird and B&C - see and buy the games and protos you only thought you would hear about.

Lynx, a selection of the best games and prototypes around

Atari ST-STE-TT-Falcon

Full Papyrus X demos, and sales.

NEXUS Gaming Competition (TBA)

Maggie Disk Magazine

Who will have a similar programme to last year (ST and Falcon), but with new demo's since last year of course Chris's Falcon is now F060! Also there will be the miracle of selected hits of Atari 8-bit on CT60, through the miracle of emulation.

Atari 8 Bit

The Devastator II, a fully functional MAME controller for your PC.

Magazines

Premier On-line Atari magazine MyAtari, and Retro-Mart plus a surprise??

Tournaments

Asteroids 7800 run by James Perrow

Tournies organised by Steve Moss, more details on web pages

Side Show

Commodore Scene will be in attendance with a C= side show .

They will be bringing the '4 player Commodore stand' and a bunch of 4 player games for people to play on. Also, they will probably be bringing our portable SX64's (x3) along with some software to show off and some of the new hardware too.

Emulators

Gamebase ST

Rob Perry - Will be showing the progress he and Paul Thompson has made on their GamebaseST project . Find out how easy they have made it to run ST games under emulation, all wrapped up in a mame32 type frontend.

Atari Portfolio

Portfolio Club (U.K).

Europe's premier Portfolio supporters, the Portfolio Club will be along to show off all things to do with the Atari handheld. Find out more Portfolio stuff at www.portfolioclub.cwc.net

More Information can be found at <http://www.uk.jagfest.org.uk/>

All Weekend Pass Holders will receive 2 free gifts for supporting JagFest UK..... a JagFest Keyring (gasp!!) and a Free full copy including Hint Book of Oxyd for Atari ST, STE, TT, Falcon, PC or MAC (even bigger gasp!!). In fact JagFest are feeling so generous we will give the Basic Oxyd pack to the first 50 who come to JagFest on Saturday or Sunday.

If you want to come along for the day, it's only £5 and you are sure of a good time, with friends new and old.. just contact me at nick@1632systems.co.uk

Hope to see you soon."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

=~ =~ =~

->In This Week's Gaming Section - Vintage Games Are Back!

'Cy Girls' Adventure!
'The Political Machine'!
And more!

=~ =~ =~

->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

'Cy Girls' Offers Many Styles of Adventure

"Cy Girls" is a combat game with so many facets that it's difficult to pigeonhole.

Part of this PlayStation 2 game involves gunplay; part involves martial arts. Some is set in the real world; the rest takes place in cyberspace. All of it involves a super-secret spy organization where the first requirement appears to be supermodel looks.

"Cy Girls" is actually two adventures in one, each on a separate disk, both set in the year 2084.

One disk features Ice, a blonde operative-for-hire who's all about sexy coolness and firepower. After a shower scene, complete with strategically placed steam, she's hired to infiltrate Net Justice, an international company that makes money via the Orwellian job of rewriting personal histories.

Once that mission is complete, Ice is caught and sent to a high-security prison, where a secret organization known as the Cy Girls helps her escape. The Girls eventually recruit her to combat evil, fight for justice and make big bucks.

(Apparently in 2084, drop-dead gorgeous women can't make a fortune acting or strolling the runways anymore.)

Ice has some impressive moves. I particularly like the way players can flatten her against a wall and then let her dart out into the open to snap off a few rounds.

The second disk is the story of Aska, a ninja warrior and Cy Girls operative who has gone AWOL from the organization to avenge the death of her father.

If Ice's moves are impressive, Aska's are truly amazing. (But then, they'd better be because she's often fighting goons with big guns.)

Not only can she run along walls or leap from tree branch to tree branch, but she can also zip to the opposite end of a corridor in the blink of an eye, or vanish in mid-air, reappearing behind an attacker. It's more magic than martial arts. With two speeds - stopped and fly-like-the-wind - she's like the Road Runner with a sword.

One nice feature is the ability of both women to plug themselves into a computer and operate in a virtual world that parallels our own.

For example, when Ice is trying to free other inmates, she can only get access to the cell locks by "diving" into cyberspace and running through a virtual copy of the prison. However, she can't get access to the cells in the cyber world unless she opens the correct doors in the real world. The result is a lot of switching between the two realms, but it keep things interesting, especially when the cyber realm has its own set of enemies to battle. (The game automatically maps your progress, a very helpful feature.)

"Cy Girls" is not tough to play, at least on the easy level. The auto-aiming capability makes Ice a sure shot, and Aska can take out several enemies simultaneously if you push her buttons correctly.

Some enemies are best fought by outrunning them. If you die, you

automatically go back to the last checkpoint with your health fully restored.

Sometimes the game fakes you out nicely. The natural tendency to have Aska jump over every chasm turns out to be a bad move in at least one instance. You will miss an important doorway if you assume that you don't want to fall down a hole.

Despite its strengths, "Cy Girls" has some unfortunate elements.

The over-arching story line - apparently tied to Damnation Monday, a catastrophic planet-wide power failure in 2058 - is more than a little vague. After introducing this "first great panic of the 21st century," the game leaps ahead 26 years for no apparent reason.

When you attack certain enemies, they lose their flesh-and-blood look and become wire-frame outlines.

Too many villains look and act alike, swaying back and forth when they're mortally wounded, like actors in a bad movie.

Boxes that are moved and chairs that have been tipped over are mysteriously returned to their original position if you leave the room for a while.

All this detracts from a sometimes-compelling, often-elegant game.

"Cy Girls" (\$40) from Konami is rated for mature audiences because of the blood, violence, suggestive themes and strong language.

Ubisoft to Publish U.S. Election Video Game

The typical video game calls for shooting aliens, racing cars and beating enemies into submission, but publisher Ubi Soft Entertainment has decided gamers may also enjoy stumping for votes at a nursing home somewhere in Ohio.

The company said on Wednesday it has signed a deal to publish "The Political Machine," a new game for PCs that puts players in control of the 2004 presidential campaigns of either incumbent President Bush or Democratic challenger, Sen. John Kerry.

Players will also have the option of creating their own Republican or Democratic candidate or managing the campaign of a historical figure like Ronald Reagan or Franklin Roosevelt.

The game will allow players to raise funds, barnstorm for votes and join candidate debates.

"We figured it would be kind of fun to be able to go around the country and try to take out ads, debate on the issues that are out there ... and see how different candidates played up against each other," Brad Wardell, the game's designer told Reuters.

Taking turns against the computer or another live player, budding "campaign managers" will have to manage a budget, coordinate strategy and give interviews on spoof political TV shows like "60 Seconds" and the "O'Maley Factor."

Most of the game's demographic data is gathered from the U.S. Census, and candidates rise in the polls by appealing to states on the issues judged most important to them.

That will require players to finesse their message to gain the backing of special interest groups and get the most states possible on board with their candidate, Wardell said.

"A player who's not a political junkie quickly learns why real-world candidates seemingly flip-flop on the issues," Wardell said.

The game is expected to be released sometime this summer, between the Democratic convention in July and the Republican convention in August.

Wardell said the public seemed to be more evenly split between the two parties and the candidates than in the past, which made the game potentially more interesting.

"We wanted to do this before the 2000 election but our models said Al Gore was going to win, so we decided not to do it," he said.

And while the game is clearly fallible as a predictive tool, Wardell said it offered some insight into real life politics.

"According to our model, Kerry should pick Gephardt as his VP," he said, referring to Missouri Rep. Richard Gephardt, who he said could deliver states like Iowa and Missouri.

So what about the outcome in November? "Right now, according to the model, Bush is going to lose by quite a bit," Wardell said.

Revenge of Pac-Man: Vintage Games Are Back

In the early 1980's, when he was 25 and working on the arcade games Defender and Robotron 2084, Eugene Jarvis wasn't sure video games would last. "There was a fear that everything would just kind of die," he said recently. Video games were new and seemingly impermanent, vulnerable to business convulsions that made him fear that he was involved in a faddish "digital Hula-Hoop" and that ever improving graphics would render early games obsolete. There were even wild theories that spaceborne alpha rays could cause arcade machines to decay.

Cosmic rays and other forces have not yet gotten the best of Mr. Jarvis's creations, which are among the most popular in the thriving market of retro games. As players age and 80's nostalgia reinvigorates interest in old games, an industry that has long focused on the present and future has become eager to herald its past.

"Retro's very popular now," said Perrin Kaplan, vice president for marketing and corporate affairs at Nintendo of America, which is introducing a classics game line. "We are part of the initiative that's happening across fashion, music and otherwise."

Last month Saturn introduced a commercial featuring its Vue sport utility vehicle rolling through a town, absorbing dots to the officially licensed sounds of a grazing Pac-Man. Billboard magazine's Hot 100 singles chart

includes "Game Over (Flip)," a song by the rapper Lil' Flip that contains a beat built from the sounds of Pac-Man.

In the world of retro fashion, video game logos and icons make for trendy T-shirts. (Most of the Atari T-shirts in circulation are not officially licensed, according to Wim Stocks, Atari's executive vice president for sales and marketing. Mr. Stocks's company was called Infogrammes until, in an acknowledgment of the retro trend last year, it adopted the faded Atari name, which it had purchased three years earlier.)

Next week Nintendo, which has only sporadically reoffered games from its extensive back catalog, will release a nostalgia line for the Game Boy Advance that includes replica versions of Donkey Kong, Super Mario Brothers and six other titles once playable on TV sets through the 1985 Nintendo Entertainment System, or NES. It will also sell a special Game Boy Advance painted to resemble the NES. The games will retail for \$20 each, a price close to that of many retro compilations of five or more games from competing publishers. Ms. Kaplan said a similar Nintendo line in Japan sold one million games in eight days.

This month the toymaker Jakks Pacific will add two new units to its own classics effort, the million-plus-selling TV Games line. The TV Games devices resemble classic arcade and home-console joysticks but actually contain and play games as well, serving as controller, processor and retro game collection all in one. One new unit will be shaped like a 1970's Atari "paddle" controller. When plugged directly into the TV, it will play 10 Atari classics, including Breakout and Warlords. The other unit resembles an arcade joystick and will include Ms. Pac-Man and four other games.

Stephen G. Berman, president of Jakks Pacific, said the appeal of the products, priced at \$25 each and sold in game stores as well as at mainstream retailers like Urban Outfitters and Walgreen's, stretched beyond current gamers. "People who don't have the ability to play and the patience to play PlayStation 2's or the Xboxes have the ability and patience to play our TV Games," he said. The joysticks have been successful enough that two major game publishers, Sega and Konami, announced separate plans last month to license competing products through Radica Games and Majesco, respectively.

Classic video games have not always been easy sells. To the uninitiated, their appeal has often been confounding. Old games tend to be basic and technically as far from today's games as silent film is to Lucasfilm. But aficionados say that well-designed game play can transcend limitations in the graphics.

Mr. Jarvis, 49, now a game designer at the arcade maker Raw Thrills, likened the appeal to that of beloved games in other formats. "You never get tired of playing Monopoly or Stratego or hearts," he said. "If you look at the very cream of the crop of the video game medium of the early 80's, there's probably 20 games there that will be fun forever."

Yet like Mr. Jarvis, plenty of designers had early doubts about their works' longevity. Yuji Naka, a Sega game developer who programmed the first Sonic the Hedgehog game in 1991, said he expected sequels to the game. "What I did not see," he said by e-mail, "was a demand for vintage Sonic games on current, then next-generation platforms."

Industry veterans speak of a bias against old games among those who work to promote new titles. "For many, many years nobody wanted to acknowledge that

these things are part of a history," said Julian Eggebrecht, president of the game developer Factor 5. "Marketing people were looking at you with a funny, 'Oh, my God, is he getting old?'"

But now classic games fit into many business plans. Robert Ennis, chief operating officer of Namco, publisher of the transcendent Pac-Man, said that classics represented about 5 percent of his company's revenue. More important, he said, the company's several "museum" collections have involved little financial risk. "The development costs have already been incurred," he said. "They are very profitable and easy to predict."

The classics have worked well not just as standalone products but as bonuses to newer games, too. Mr. Eggebrecht said his development team included an influential 1982 Star Wars arcade game as a bonus in its 2003 Star Wars title to show gamers the inspiration behind the 2003 game.

In 2002 Atari programmers added to the entertainment value of a racing game, Test Drive, by letting gamers play Pong during between-level load times. The same year, Nintendo designers enabled players to collect and play classic Nintendo games in the virtual town of the console game Animal Crossing. Enthusiasm for that feature helped inspire Nintendo's classic line, according to Ms. Kaplan.

Digital Eclipse, a company often hired to bring old games to new machines, is having its busiest year of retro projects yet, according to its creative director, Mike Mika. The diversity of the company's work reflects the broadening uses for old games: retro compilations for consoles and the PC, an assignment to insert classic Tron arcade games into a 2004 Tron title, and the squeezing of the once-controversial 1992 fighting game Mortal Kombat into cellphones for THQ Wireless.

Digital Eclipse has also brought Mr. Jarvis's work to multiple platforms, including the current rights-holder's Web site, www.midway.com, where they can be played free.

Once relatively rare, some classic games are now likely to be owned in multiples. Greg Canessa, group manager of casual games at Microsoft, where he is creating a classic-games download service for the Xbox called Xbox Live Arcade, said he owns 16 versions of Pac-Man, and will "still stick quarters into Pac-Man when I see it at the old soda shop or burger joint."

"There's just something about the classics," he said, adding, "I'll be an old man playing these games."

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->A-ONE Gaming Online

- Online Users Growl & Purr!

Two Weeks Till JagFest UK 12/13 June

Well first of all thanks to Pocket, Arethius, Scat and other who made the Jaguar Connexion in France a real nice place to be. Plenty of games,

plenty of collectibles, plenty to see and do...

But now come the Brits with JagFest'04, June 12/13... are you planning to come and see what's happening in the UK Atari World? We still have some more work to do but the event is shaping up nicely with the following attractions.....

Licensed Bar -- A little liquid refreshment to help the RAFFLE go down

Jaguar

Battlesphere Tourney run by Gaztee plus all the latest and Greatest Releases inc Songbird and B&C - see and buy the games and protos you only thought you would hear about.

Lynx, a selection of the best games and prototypes around

Atari ST-STE-TT-Falcon
Full Papyrus X demos, and sales.
NEXUS Gaming Competition (TBA)
Maggie Disk Magazine

Who will have a similar programme to last year (ST and Falcon), but with new demo's since last year of course Chris's Falcon is now F060! Also there will be the miracle of selected hits of Atari 8-bit on CT60, through the miracle of emulation.

Atari 8 Bit

The Devastator II, a fully functional MAME controller for your PC.

Magazines

Premier On-line Atari magazine MyAtari, and Retro-Mart plus a surprise??

Tournaments

Asteroids 7800 run by James Perrow

Tournies organised by Steve Moss, more details on web pages

Side Show

Commodore Scene will be in attendance with a C= side show . They will be bringing the '4 player Commodore stand' and a bunch of 4-player games for people to play on. Also, they will probably be bringing our portable SX64's (x3) along with some software to show off and some of the new hardware too.

Emulators

Gamebase ST

Rob Perry - Will be showing the progress he and Paul Thompson has made on their GamebaseST project . Find out how easy they have made it to run ST games under emulation, all wrapped up in a mame32 type frontend.

Atari Portfolio

Portfolio Club (U.K.).

Europes premier Portfolio supporters, the Portfolio Club will be along to show off all things to do with the Atari handheld. Find out more Portfolio stuff at www.portfolioclub.cwc.net

More Information can be found at <http://www.uk.jagfest.org.uk/>

All Weekend Pass Holders will receive 2 free gifts for supporting JagFest UK..... a JagFest Keyring (gasp!!) and a Free full copy including Hint Book of Oxyd for Atari ST, STE, TT, Falcon, PC or MAC (even bigger gasp!!). In

fact JagFest are feeling so generous we will give the Basic Oxyd pack to the first 50 who come to JagFest on Saturday or Sunday.

If you want to come along for the day, it's only £5 and you are sure of a good time, with friends new and old.. just contact me at nick@1632systems.co.uk

Hope to see you soon.

Nick Harlow

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Nick Harlow
16/32 Systems
Webshop: <http://www.1632-sales.zenwebhosting.com/acatalog/>
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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Sasser, Netsky Continue To Dominate

Authorities may have arrested those responsible for the destructive Sasser and Netsky e-mail worms - but their effects still linger, according to security firm Sophos.

"Sasser proved to be a major nuisance in May, affecting even more users than even the Netsky worms," said Chris Kraft, senior security analyst. "Requiring no user intervention and taking advantage of a relatively new Microsoft hole, it sneaked onto unprotected PCs, inundating Internet connections."

Sasser, apparently launched by an 18-year-old young man from Germany, wound up disrupting not only countless home users' PCs, but also systems at Delta Airlines and the Coast Guard. Indeed, the story of Sasser is a sorry lesson for all concerned, illustrating that even the slightly skilled now are able to disrupt corporate networks.

At least that is what Panda Software CTO Patrick Hinojosa finds so maddening about Sasser. "It is very simple to write these things," he told NewsFactor, "and with some worms - e-mail worms in particular - it takes hardly any skill at all. You can do it from a kit, in fact."

The Sasser worm easily could have been stopped in its tracks from the outset, Hinojosa says, as Microsoft identified the vulnerability and offered a patch for it a few weeks before the worm appeared. "This element of network security is not rocket science - it is a default configuration."

The situation is not getting any better, according to Sophos. "Both Sasser

and Netsky may have captured the headlines, but there were many other viruses written this month - 959 in total," Kraft said. "In the month of May, we saw a considerable increase in cyber-criminal activity, which suggests that even the arrest of Sven Jaschan, the German teenager who has owned up to writing Sasser and Netsky, has done very little to limit the problem."

The 959 new viruses Sophos identified in May represent the highest number of new viruses discovered in a single month since December 2001, the firm said.

Korgo Worm on the Move

Yet another computer worm that takes advantage of a Windows vulnerability is spreading, with the potential to cause serious headaches for users who are not protected.

The Korgo worm, which first emerged last month, attempts to propagate by exploiting the same Microsoft buffer-overrun vulnerability used by the nefarious Sasser virus. It affects computer users on Windows 2000 and Windows XP, and potentially could open back doors on TCP ports 113 and 3067.

In its latest iteration, W32.Korgo.G, the worm could leave systems open to unauthorized access, resulting in the theft of confidential data and compromised security settings, according to security firm Symantec. Users are advised to stay current with security patches offered by Microsoft.

Korgo is a low threat that is spreading slowly, says Bruce Hughes of TruSecure, but he told NewsFactor that if it invades a machine, hackers could gain full access to the computer.

The worm essentially attaches itself to the IRC server, which handles online chat communications. Once inside, it can download any information in the computer, he explained.

Companies and individual users should block TC port 6667, which connects the computer to the IRC server, Hughes advises. With this outbound port blocked, he says, the worm cannot propagate.

As of Friday morning, the number of Korgo infections has tapered off after spiking on Wednesday, wreaking havoc primarily among consumers, according to Symantec.

Hacking Sparks Need for Complex Passwords

As more Web sites demand passwords, scammers are getting more clever about stealing them. Hence the need for such "passwords-plus" systems.

To access her bank account online, Marie Jubran opens a Web browser and types in her Swedish national ID number along with a four-digit password.

For additional security, she then pulls out a card that has 50 scratch-off codes. Jubran uses the codes, one by one, each time she logs on or performs

a transaction. Her bank, Nordea PLC, automatically sends a new card when she's about to run out.

Scandinavian countries are among the leaders as many online businesses abandon static passwords in favor of so-called two-factor authentication.

"A password is a construct of the past that has run out of steam," said Joseph Atick, chief executive of Identix Inc., a Minnesota designer of fingerprint-based authentication. "The human mind-set is not used to dealing with so many different passwords and so many different PINs."

When a static password alone is required, security experts recommend that users combine letters and numbers and avoid easy-to-guess passwords like "1234" or a nickname.

Stevan Hoffacker follows those rules but commits a different faux pas: He uses the same password everywhere, including access to multiple e-mail accounts, Amazon.com, The New York Times' Web site and E-ZPass electronic toll statements.

In such cases, should hackers or scammers compromise one account, they potentially have one's entire online life.

"This is one of these things that if I stop and think about it, it is not good, but I do my best not to stop and think about it," said Hoffacker, an information technology manager in New York.

But it's difficult to remember dozens of strong passwords - so many sites now require them. Alternatives include writing them down on a sticky note attached to a monitor or in an electronic spreadsheet - practices security experts also deem unsafe.

Software such as Symantec Corp.'s Norton Password Manager and Apple Computer Inc.'s Keychain help store passwords in secure, encrypted form. But if you compromise the master password, you're out of luck. Your entire collection is gone.

Many sites, meanwhile, will e-mail passwords insecurely - without encryption - if you forget. A site called BugMeNot.com even encourages users to share passwords for nonfinancial sites like newspapers.

The tools of password harvesting are many:

Keystroke recorders secretly installed at public Internet terminals can capture passwords, as can "phishing" e-mails designed to trick users into submitting sensitive data to fraudulent sites that look authentic. There are computer viruses programmed to harvest passwords as well as software that guesses passwords by running through words in dictionaries.

Though analysts have no hard figures on password-specific fraud, they blame insecure passwords for unauthorized financial transfers, privacy breaches and even the hacking of corporate networks.

With two-factor authentication, having a password alone is useless.

"We will never play the fear factor here, but still it stays a fact that with our products, phishing is no longer an issue," said Jochem Binst of Vasco Data Security International Inc.

The Belgian company issues devices the size of pocket calculators or

keychains. You type your regular password into the device for a second code that is based on the time and the unit's unique characteristics. That's the code you type into the Web site.

Someone who steals your device won't have your password; someone who steals your password won't have your device.

MasterCard International Inc. has been testing similar systems in Britain, Germany and Brazil. Swipe a credit card with a smart chip into a special reader, enter your PIN and obtain a password good only once at Office Max, British Airways and a dozen other merchants.

In Singapore, bank customers wishing to designate new accounts for fund transfers must likewise obtain a second password - through a phone call, e-mail or mobile text messaging.

Biometric systems are similar, except a fingerprint or iris scan replaces one or both passwords.

In the United States, use of two-factor authentication remains limited. RSA Security Inc. has several products, including RSA SecurID, but they are primarily issued to employees for remote network access and to customers with high-value portfolios.

"There's a delicate balance between maintaining security but also providing customers with ease of use," said Doug Johnson, senior policy analyst at the American Bankers Association.

Gartner analyst Avivah Litan said banks are "all afraid of making the first step. They don't want consumers going to other banks because it's too hard."

U.S. banks and e-commerce companies have focused, for now, on making sure passwords are strong. EBay, for instance, now rejects attempts to create passwords such as "ebay" or "password."

Before two-factor authentication becomes commonplace, laptops must come standard with biometric readers, or manufacturers must bring down costs for password-generating devices.

Outfitting 1 million customers with such devices could cost \$20 million, while Internet fraud for those customers amounts to "tens of thousands at most," said Tony Chew, director of technology risk supervision at the Monetary Authority of Singapore. Singapore banks thus limit dynamic passwords to fund transfers, he said.

Companies also need to set standards.

Though Jubran enjoys her bank's scratch-off passwords, she wouldn't want the Amazon.coms of the world all adopting them as well.

"It would be too complicated to have 10 different cards you scrape off," the 24-year-old medical student said.

Jason Lewis, vice president of product management at RSA Security, figures companies will have to create services so a single device can work on multiple sites.

Nordea and other Scandinavian banks already have partnered with government agencies and utilities, and an identity-management coalition called the

Liberty Alliance Project has begun to explore standards.

People will pay more attention to security as they keep more of their lives online, said Robert Chesnut, eBay's vice president for rules, trust and safety. He offered this analogy: "The more stuff you have in your house, the better the deadbolt lock you have."

Spam Gets Dangerous

ISPs and spam filters are blocking record amounts of unsolicited messages, but this electronic nuisance is hardly on the decline - and it's getting nastier. Security experts report a growing link between spam and viruses, according to e-mail vendors and analysts at the inaugural INBOX: The Email Event conference here this week.

"You can't separate spam and viruses anymore," said Mark Sunner, chief technology officer of e-mail security vendor MessageLabs. "Virtually all the viruses this year have to do with spam," he said, speaking at a conference session entitled "How Serious Is It? The Threats by the Numbers."

Sunner said two-thirds of global e-mail is spam, and roughly two-thirds of those messages are sent from open proxies. Open proxies are insecure systems that accept connections from any network address and thus serve as gateways for untraceable spam. Open proxies can also allow the placement of a kind of Trojan horse program called a "botnet" on your system without your knowledge. Thousands of these viruses can infect systems and be instructed to launch a denial-of-service attack on a Web site.

You can prevent most such worms by keeping your antivirus software up-to-date, but there's always a lag of several hours between the time a virus outbreak is detected and when antivirus vendors post a fix for it. "Because the antivirus industry is reactive, there's always a window of vulnerability," Sunner said.

Recent months have seen a tremendous increase in phishing attacks, in which criminals try to steal credit card numbers and other personal information by sending messages that mimic official e-mail from large financial institutions. The links in the falsified e-mail lead to fake but official-looking Web sites.

The number of phishing attacks increased 180 percent from March to April this year, and the average monthly increase is 50 percent, according to Dave Jevans, senior vice president at e-mail security firm Tumbleweed Communications. Speaking at the same session, Jevans said "phishers" can rake in \$100,000 per attack, and it can cost a company \$30,000 to recover from such an attack. He also claimed 30 new phishing attacks occur every day.

Despite the continuing spam tidal wave and the arrival of more dangerous e-mail-borne pests, most analysts at the conference are upbeat about the changes under way in the messaging arena.

In his keynote address, Eric Hahn, chair of antispam vendor Proofpoint, extolled the virtues of the current e-mail system, which he said has served us very well over the past 30 years. Still, Hahn pointed out that the slow pace of change in the e-mail infrastructure needs to accelerate. "It's

broken now; it's not serving us today," he said.

Hahn believes spam will eventually be beaten. "Even though spam traffic is increasing, the number of spam messages [getting through to users] is constant or dropping. Chalk one up to the good guys," Hahn said.

Not all INBOX session speakers share Hahn's optimism, however. While speakers generally agreed progress is being made in the important area of authentication, no universal authentication systems are in the offing. And a universal system still wouldn't solve all security-related e-mail problems.

That's because spammers aren't likely to play by the rules, said Dave Crocker, principal at the Internet consulting firm Brandenburg InterNetworking. "Spammers behave like criminals," he said, speaking at a conference session entitled "The Role of Authentication in E-Mail."

Crocker said the industry needs "incremental solutions that have a big impact in the short term." However, he cautioned that organizations underestimate the infrastructure costs of authentication. Also, users get annoyed if sending e-mail becomes too much hassle.

Another analyst who views the glass as half-full is Esther Dyson, editor of the popular technology newsletter Release 1.0, another featured speaker.

Dyson described her vision of the e-mail system of the future in a session entitled "Mail 2.0." She sees all messages, alerts, contacts, tasks, documents, shared calendars, and other information residing in a "cloud" that we can access securely from almost anywhere.

Such a next-generation messaging system will require more-robust access controls and ID management, as well as better thread management and search/classification capabilities, Dyson said. To be effective, it will also need the immediacy provided today with instant messaging. Unfortunately, she added, there's one massive impediment to the development of systems with that level of interoperability: Dyson calls it "the gravitational force of Outlook," Microsoft's ubiquitous e-mail program - and the target of many worms spread via spam.

Striking Back at Spyware

Joe ZeffHere's good news for surfers stressing over spyware that surreptitiously slips onto their PCs to track their whereabouts and serve up advertising: A legal noose is starting to tighten around its purveyors.

Utah has made installing programs on a PC without the user's approval a \$10,000 offense. California, Iowa, and New York are considering similar laws, and Congress is weighing federal legislation.

"Using underhanded tactics, these companies are not only invading your privacy but hurting legitimate online companies," says Utah state representative Steve Urquhart, sponsor of that state's Spyware Control Act.

Spyware's recent spread has been breathtaking. Network monitoring firm Websense found spyware on 92 percent of PCs in an April study of firms with more than 100 employees. Microsoft blames spyware for over half of all application crashes. An analysis by EarthLink/Webroot reports an average of

28 spyware programs running on each PC it scanned for a recent study.

But some observers think anti-spyware laws will prohibit legitimate online ads and stifle innovation. "We feel this law will essentially outlaw a perfectly acceptable form of advertising and commerce," says Emily Hackett, executive director of Internet Alliance, a vendor trade association.

Advertisers and makers of ad programs want laws to distinguish between spyware and adware. "We agree there is a problem," says Robert Regular, president, Americas, of Cydoor Desktop Media. He notes that spyware installs itself without your consent and tracks your surfing habits so it can target ads.

The Federal Trade Commission has voiced its concerns about the scope and burden of new laws, says Tom Pahl, assistant director for advertising practices. Still, the FTC has not yet taken an official position on the new laws, he adds.

The legitimate adware business is small and focused on survival and growth, making it hard to work on proposed self-regulation, notes Tim Hickernell, vice president of market research firm MetaGroup. He opposes legislation and says that Utah's law goes too far.

For now, worried users can try the spyware removal tools at "Free Internet Utilities: Kill Spyware, Pop-Ups, Home Page Hijacking".

Lindows Wins a Round in Court

Lindows is claiming a victory in its latest trademark tussle with Microsoft this week after a Dutch court denied a request by Microsoft that the Linux-based software vendor be barred from using the Lindows name in connection with sales of its products in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg.

Under the ruling, Lindows is permitted to resume sales in the three countries and Microsoft must pay the San Diego, California, company \$1156 to cover legal costs, Lindows says.

The decision made in the Amsterdam District Court last week is just the latest wrinkle in a prolonged, international trademark dispute between the companies. Microsoft has pursued cases against Lindows in the U.S., Canada, and several European countries, claiming that the Lindows name infringes upon its Windows trademark - with varying success.

Earlier this year, a Dutch court ruled in favor of Microsoft, ordering Lindows to halt sales of its products under the Lindows name in the Benelux countries and make its Lindows.com Web site inaccessible to visitors from the countries. In response to the ruling, Lindows changed the name of its LindowsOS operating system to "Linspire" and created a new Linspire.com Web site address.

However, Microsoft claimed that the company was not fully complying with the ruling by using the Lindows trade name in conjunction with the sale of Linspire products and filed a second injunction request that the open source vendor be barred from distributing or advertising its products in the Benelux countries under the Lindows name with a penalty of \$122,000 a

day.

The court dismissed this request last week, calling the demand "too wide ranging," according to court documents. It also ordered that the Redmond, Washington, company immediately pay the cost of Lindows' legal action.

In a statement released this week, Lindows Chief Executive Officer Michael Robertson lauds the decision as a turnaround and says the company would immediately resume sales of its Linspire products in the Benelux countries.

Representatives for Microsoft in Europe say they could not comment on the decision.

AOL Settles Billing Lawsuits

America Online has agreed to settle a pair of class action lawsuits brought on behalf of subscribers to the online services of AOL and its CompuServe unit. They allege AOL and CompuServe continued to bill them after the plaintiffs asked for their subscriptions to be cancelled.

AOL "vigorously denies any liability" related to the allegations, but agreed to settle to avoid the "undue burden and cost" of further litigation and to resolve the matter, AOL says in a statement released jointly this week with the Locks Law Firm, one of the firms representing the plaintiffs.

However, as part of the agreement, AOL also has agreed to make changes in its procedures to prevent post-cancellation charges in the future, according to the publication notice in the CancelRefund.com Web site, which contains documents related to the cases and the settlement.

The class action lawsuits in Oklahoma and California will be dismissed as a result of the settlement agreement, whose final court approval will be addressed at a hearing on October 21, 2004 in Drumright, Oklahoma, according to the statement.

"As part of this agreement, AOL will make refunds available to those AOL and CompuServe subscribers who tried to terminate their service, thereafter were billed for service, and who wrote or telephoned AOL before April 6, 2004 to request a refund," the statement reads.

The proposed settlement calls for AOL to provide refunds of up to 4 months of subscription fees, at a rate of \$21.95 per month. How much of a refund a plaintiff receives will depend on his or her specific claim. Separate from the settlement fund, AOL has also agreed to pay the plaintiffs \$3 million for attorney's fees and costs.

The proposed settlement class consists of all AOL subscribers and former subscribers in the U.S. who allegedly incurred post-cancellation charges between June 7, 1996 and April 6, 2004 and who allege that they were wrongfully charged for subscriptions at any time after they attempted to cancel, according to the publication notice.

To receive a refund, a member of the settlement class has to file a claim. The claim forms can be found, along with other documents related to the cases, on the CancelRefund.com Web site.

"We're pleased that we're in the process to bring this matter to conclusion and pleased we were able to reach this settlement," says Nicholas Graham, an AOL spokesperson.

However, this settlement doesn't close the book on this matter for AOL, because there is other ongoing litigation related to this improper billing issue. "We're aware of other pending litigation matters on the same subject in other states, some brought by attorneys general and others by private parties," Graham says. He didn't know how many such cases are ongoing.

An attorney for the plaintiffs didn't immediately return calls seeking comment, but all the plaintiffs' attorneys believe the settlement is fair, adequate, reasonable, and in the best interests of the plaintiffs, according to the publication notice.

One case is Clough v. AOL, case number D-CJ-2001-13, in the District Court for the Twenty-Fourth Judicial District, Drumright Division, Creek County, Oklahoma. This case covers a nationwide class of plaintiffs. The other case, which covers only California, is Mendoza v. AOL, case number 827047-2, in the Superior Court of Alameda County, California.

The plaintiffs' main allegation is that when subscribers instructed AOL or CompuServe to cancel their subscriptions, following the instructions provided by the companies in their terms of service, AOL and CompuServe "either failed to process the cancellation request or reactivated the subscription after cancellation as the result of a third party, such as a family member or friend, using the account without authorization," according to the publication notice. This resulted in subscribers being improperly billed, the plaintiffs say, although AOL denies all of the plaintiffs' allegations.

Judge Joe Sam Vassar of the Twenty-Fourth Judicial District court gave preliminary approval to the settlement on May 26. He will preside the October hearing where final approval will be sought.

Microsoft Offers Test Version of New Media Player

Microsoft Corp. released on Wednesday a preliminary version of its newest software package for playing video and audio on personal computers that will also allow online music stores to sell songs over the Web.

The new version, called Windows Media Player 10, is being released as a technical beta program aimed at enthusiasts and early adopters for testing and feedback.

Microsoft's new media player, which competes against RealNetworks Inc.'s RealPlayer and Apple Computer Inc.'s QuickTime player, is also designed to work with a new line of portable media devices using Microsoft's Portable Media Center software.

The most notable new feature, however, is the new player's ability to offer music and video from different vendors directly through the player, Microsoft's answer to Apple's hit music store iTunes.

"We are testing a new concept currently called the 'Digital Media Mall' that offers a selection of online music stores and video services that work

seamlessly in the player," Redmond, Washington-based Microsoft said in a statement.

Microsoft said the new player will also work with subscription style music services, where users can stream and listen to songs for a subscription fee rather than paying for each download.

Microsoft also said that the new media player will have a "simple, clean" interface and that the full version will be released later this year.

Solaris Will Go Open Source

After months of hinting about its intentions, Sun Microsystems has confirmed it will release source code from its Solaris operating system under an open source license. An open source Solaris is in the works, Sun spokesperson Russ Castronovo has confirmed. However, he declines to reveal any significant details about the project, including what software license Sun will use, whether all of the components of the operating system will be open-sourced, and when, exactly, Sun intends to release an open source Solaris.

"At this time it's in the development phase," Castronovo says. "We're in the thinking about it stage, and looking at details. There are a million details to work out."

The debate over whether to open source Solaris has been a contentious one, according to sources within Sun. As recently as Tuesday, Sun Chief Executive Officer Scott McNealy was claiming it would make little sense for Sun to freely release such a valuable asset.

But Sun has, in fact, released a number of open source software products to date.

Already released as open source are the OpenOffice productivity suite, components of the Gnome desktop, and the Tomcat servlet container. However, the company has, until now, declined to release its most important software assets - Solaris and the Java platform - under an open source license.

However, the company has recently stepped up its efforts to lure programmers to develop for its platforms.

While the central kernel of the Solaris operating system includes some interesting technology, an open source Solaris will need to materialize within the next few months if it is to be of any interest to developers, says Eric Raymond, founder of the Open Source Initiative, a nonprofit corporation created to help companies develop open source software licenses.

"If [Sun] doesn't get this done within six months, it's not going to matter at all because Linux is advancing too fast," he says.

Sun has lost a significant portion of its business to Linux servers running on inexpensive Intel-based systems. Linux server shipments grew by 57 percent year-over-year in the first quarter of 2004, while sales of Unix servers declined by three percent during that time, according to industry research firm IDC.

The fact that Sun is now planning to open source Solaris is somewhat ironic, Raymond adds. "It is a matter of record that Linux was written because Solaris was too expensive and was closed source," he says. "If they had open sourced it in 1990 or sooner, Linux would never have happened."

Microsoft Wins Patent for Handheld Computer Click

Computer users with itchy trigger fingers take note: The next time you open a software program with two quick clicks on a handheld computer you may be engaging in a process patented by Microsoft Corp.

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office on April 27 granted a patent for a "time based hardware button for application launch" in which a click of a button can start different programs if it is clicked once, twice or held down for several seconds.

That's a process familiar to countless computer users who have double-clicked their way through Microsoft's Windows operating system, as well as anyone who's tried to set the time on a digital watch.

Mouse-wielding computer users need not worry, as the patent only applies to handheld computers which run Microsoft's PocketPC software - specifically the method of bringing up different features depending on how many times a button is pressed.

But the application highlights shortcomings in the Patent and Trademark Office, where examiners short on time and resources are hard-pressed to root out earlier examples of similar technology, said San Francisco patent consultant Gregory Aharonian.

"Unless the examiner had a patent or journal article in front of them, it's going to be hard" to reject the application, he said. "The examiners need the pieces of paper. They're like the IRS."

The Federal Trade Commission last year said the PTO should not grant patents so readily, as those granted for obvious concepts, such as one granted in 1895 for putting a gasoline engine in a car, can impede progress by preventing competitors from improving on them.

PTO spokeswoman Brigid Quinn declined to comment about the patent but said anyone was free to challenge it.

"If people feel that the patent is either not novel or that it's obvious, they can send us the evidence and if indeed the prior art raises a question of patentability we will examine it," Quinn said.

Microsoft, which spends nearly \$7 billion yearly on research, said that it regularly patents technologies around the use of software and computers.

Aharonian said Microsoft has never filed a patent-violation suit to the best of his knowledge.

The company has been the target of patent suits, however. Privately held Eolas Technologies Inc. won a \$520 million judgment last August after a jury determined that Microsoft had violated Eolas' patent when it designed its Internet Explorer browser to run mini-applications that allow Web users to fill out forms and use other interactive features.

Microsoft has appealed that decision and the PTO agreed to review the patent after the standard-setting World Wide Web Consortium challenged it.

Plug Into Easy, Cheap Broadband

High-speed Internet access may one day come from your electric company, thanks to broadband-over-power-line technology. BPL got off the ground recently when Current Communications and Ohio-based utility Cinergy partnered to begin offering the service.

Current Broadband is available only in the Cincinnati area. But the company says that roughly 1.5 million Cinergy customers in Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky can later choose among three options: a 1-megabit-per-second connection for \$30 per month, 2 mbps for \$35, and 3 mbps for \$40. Cable and DSL services cost \$30 to \$50 for speeds usually well below 1.5 mbps.

I tried out BPL at a house in Maryland where Current piloted the service. Once a power company installs BPL equipment on electrical boxes or poles, customers simply plug their power-line modem into any electrical outlet (Current provides the first modem for free). The modem connects to your PC via USB, ethernet, or sometimes Wi-Fi. In the controlled environment of the pilot site, the BPL connection was fast, but real-world performance may vary.

Current's BPL service includes five e-mail addresses, 15MB of e-mail storage, and a personal Web site. It offers the same high-speed connection both up- and downstream. Cable and DSL services typically limit upload speeds to a fraction of download speed.

BPL service makes sense for people who don't already have broadband or who want two-way speeds and slightly lower prices. But it may take years for BPL to reach most people - if it ever reaches them at all.

Another hurdle: BPL may interfere with radio signals. The Federal Communications Commission is considering rules to forestall such problems, but those rules won't be finalized for months.

HP Promotes Color Printers, Cameras

Most people prefer color images, but high-quality color laser printers have been too expensive for many small businesses and home photographers, said Vyomesh Joshi, executive vice president for HP's Imaging and Printing group, at the product introduction Wednesday. New laser printers, digital cameras, and even paper will help small businesses spice up their presentations and brochures with affordable color images, he said.

The HP Color LaserJet 2550 is HP's first color laser printer priced under \$500, with a estimated list price of \$499. This product will allow small businesses to bring sophisticated color printing jobs back in-house and save money on external printing costs, Joshi said.

HP also announced a color laser printer, the HP Color LaserJet 4650, that costs \$1799 and can print up to 22 color pages a minute. It's faster than

all but one of HP's Color LaserJet printers and is the fastest Color LaserJet priced under \$2000. The company introduced new paper for documents, postcards, and address labels designed especially for its new color laser printers.

For consumers, HP now offers the \$99 HP PSC 1315 all-in-one inkjet printer, copier, and scanner designed to print digital images, such as the ones captured by HP's new 5.1-megapixel Photosmart R707 digital camera, priced at \$349.

The company's renewed focus on digital color extends beyond new products. HP also plans to work with imaging companies such as Adobe Systems, Apple, Microsoft, and Quark on new software with improved color management technology. The focus is on applications to help consumers and businesses edit digital images and publish documents.

Just about every PC company has focused on products and services outside the core PC market as it has matured. HP's historical strength in printing and imaging has led it to emphasize digital photography over other consumer electronics products such as music players or digital televisions touted by companies such as Apple, Dell, and Gateway.

The Imaging and Printing group at HP is generally its most profitable business. In the second quarter of this year, its \$953 million in operating profit accounted for the vast majority of HP's total operating profit of \$1.4 billion.

Dell's recent push into the printer market has caused some analysts to wonder if Dell can harm HP's printer margins with its less-expensive products. In response, HP has emphasized its research and development efforts into new enterprise printing products, such as the focus on digital color highlighted in Wednesday's announcements.

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